

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

A Resource for “The Backlash against Teaching about Islam”

1. When you hear the term “religious literacy,” what does it mean to you? How does the author use the term “religious literacy?” Why is it viewed as a global competency?
2. What concerns have parents and activists expressed about lessons about Islam? How has the backlash against teaching about Islam affected educational politics and policy in Tennessee in particular?
3. What advocacy groups have galvanized opposition to teaching about Islam?
 - a. Research these groups. What other positions are they known for?
 - b. How would you describe the political stance of these groups?
 - c. Do you believe these groups have a neutral (balanced) perspective on Islam?
4. What is Islamophobia? Does Islamophobia play a role in the opposition to teachers providing lessons to students about Islam? Give examples for your conclusions.
5. The heated debate on teaching about Islam can be placed in the context of a long history of controversies on teaching about controversial subjects.
 - a. What other subjects have generated opposition from parents and activists?
 - b. How are these subjects similar, and how are they different?
 - c. Why are these subjects considered controversial?
 - d. Do you think these debates are good for schools and students? Why or why not?
6. In *Abington v. Schempp* (1963), what did the U.S. Supreme Court decide about prayer and Bible readings in school? What did it say about academic lessons regarding world religions? Can you describe the difference between prayer and academic lessons about religion?
7. In 2000, the Modesto, California school district became the only school district in the nation to require all students to take a course in world religions. What did researchers Emile Lester and Patrick Roberts find in their empirical study of the course? What has journalist Linda K. Wertheimer concluded about the course? Does this surprise you? Why or why not?
8. Do you think schools should teach academic lessons about Islam and other world religions?
 - a. Do you think these lessons are valuable for students? Why or why not? Be sure to support your answers.

- b. In your opinion, why do many parents and activists oppose teaching about Islam in schools?
 - c. Do you think those who oppose teaching about Islam have legitimate concerns? Why or why not? Be sure to support your answers.
9. Would you like to learn about different world religions? Please describe reasons for your choice.